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SHORTGRASS COUNTRY by Monte Noelke

Christmas night, thunderstorms raged across the Shortgrass Country. The condition was so unusual. No sayings or prophecies exist of what is going to happen when thunder and lightning occur on the Noel. However, what did happen was that in a week the earth trembled and shook enough to registered 4.7 on the Richter scale.

A thunderstorm over a desert land on the night of calm and peace was obviously an omen; the earthquake in a land so rarely shaken by such events was to enforce the message of Christmas night.

Time had come, I thought for the Shortgrass herders to trim back on wild exaggerations such as the size of their lamb crops or the weight of their steer calves. San Angelo merchants were being given final warning to stop advertising close-out sales 52 times a year; and high stepping hombres, like wool capital doctors and lawyers, were being sent a direct message to think about something besides jacking up the size of their fees.

The first chance to study the effects of the omens was at the downtown cafe in Mertzon after the Sunday morning church services. A big group of church-goers were sitting together. At a distance of three table lengths away, they

looked as innocent as the well dressed children who were clamoring about the room.

My Mother was along as my guest. She is a very popular person and draws a large amount of ohing and ahing that is reserved for pleasant grandmothers. Before they had a chance to ask why I hadn't been to church, I threw them off my trail by asking who the new treasurer was going to be for their congregation in 1992.

I figured correctly if they were so unobservant as to have missed the point of the thunderstorm on Christmas and the earthquake on New Year's Day, they weren't going to catch on that all I was going to do was to inquire about the office, not make a contribution to the office.

The big test is going to be when the cow sales open up again for business. I don't expect a big reformation; however, as tender as those buyer's consciences must be, they may not need a third warning.